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## ABSTRACT

The word Islam means submission, as in "submission to the will of God." Islam in China has been propagated over the past 1,300 years primarily among the people now known as "Hui." Hui teaching (Hui jiao) was the general term once used in China for Islam. The Hui are unique among the 55 identified minority nationalities in China in that they are the only nationality for whom religion is the only unifying category of identity, even though many members of the Hui nationality may not practice Islam. The Chinese government has made policy modifications for minority students so that each student can reach a certain "cultural level." Since many young people are eager to partake in modernization to obtain higher social status and living standards, Muslim religious study will have a difficult time attracting young members to practice the faith. A description of a traditional view of Islamic education and its scholars is outlined. Chinese Muslims and their education is compared with the philosophy of Islam. Chinese educational reform and the impact upon Chinese Muslims is discussed. (BT)

## Education of Chinese Muslims: Changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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**Education of Chinese Muslims: Changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**  
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**I. Introduction**

Islam in China has been propagated over the past thirteen hundred years primarily among the people now known as "Hui". Hui teaching (Hui jiao) was the general term once used in Chinese for Islam (Oxford, 1995). Most Hui are closer to the Han Chinese than the other Muslim nationalities in terms of demographic proximity, cultural accommodation, and adaptation of many of their Islamic practices to Han ways of life. The Hui are unique among the 55 identified minority nationalities in China in that they are the only nationality for whom religion is the only unifying category of identity, even though many members of the Hui nationality may not practice Islam.

In this paper a traditional view of Islamic education and its scholars will be discussed. Chinese Muslims and their education will be compared with the Islamic philosophy, Chinese educational reform and their impact upon Chinese Muslims will be shared.

The word "Islam", means "submission" as in "submission to the will of God" (Reagan, 2000). Education from an Islamic point of view makes little sense if one removes it from a religious context, and it is on the Quran that educational thought should be grounded. The Islamic nationalities regarded education as

more or less equivalent to training in their religion. The Quran, as well as Islamic doctrines, practices, and history automatically dominated the curriculum. Moreover, the site for education was the mosque, and the main aim was to train religious leaders (Postiglione, 1999). However, Islamic educational thought has been further developed and articulated by Muslim scholars and educators. Among them al-Ghazali (1058-1111) and Ibn Khaldun's (1332-1406) philosophies of education are considered important to Islamic education. According to al-Ghazali, a theologian, mystic and teacher, education is characterized by a deep spirituality coupled with both a good deal of common sense and an obvious concern and affection for children. Al-Ghazali believed that all children have the capacity to learn. Ibn Khaldun, a historian, believed that education could only take place in a civilized social order. He stated that learning is conditioned by the nature of the material, intellectual and spiritual forces of the civilization in which one lives " (Reagan, 2000, p. 193).

## **II. Traditional Education of Hui Chinese**

The situation with Hui education was more complicated compared with other minorities in China. The Hui accepted Confucian and hence Han influence to a far greater extent than did the Turkic nationalities or the Tajiks. Broomhall (1987 in Berlie, 1997) compared Chinese Han and Islamic philosophy from one literature. It stated " --- As to religion, then the Purity and Truth of religion--- to ponder one's parents' grace (a virtue *xia*, filial piety), to be grateful to our teachers' instruction. To think on friends and friendliness. --- This is the purpose

of worship (The correct Doctrine of Purity and Truth (Islam). It is evident that Confucian has impact on Islamic teaching.

The Muslim educational system is closely associated with the mosque. The system paralleled the Confucian literati training program but was not supported by imperial authorities nor was it recognized by the imperial government (Gladney, 1999).

### **Traditional Islamic Education in China**

1. During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, there were special government schools for the Hui, which taught the Confucian classics and ethics; some Hui opened their own private academies. There were also Quranic schools at the Hui mosques.

In the early Ming dynasty, the tendency was for the Hui to adopt Chinese as their own language, and consequently give up speaking Arabic and Persian. To remedy this situation, the Hui Muslim clergy began to set up Arabic and Persian Quranic schools called Hui-language great schools (Huiwen dxue).

2. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there was a whole system of these mosque schools. The aim was to teach Arabic, Persian, the Quran and Islamic doctrine to selected men to be Muslim teachers and clergy. A limited number of similar schools were found for women. The Muslim women's school (Qingzhen nuxue) was

established in Kaifeng, Henan Province, during the Jiaqing period (1796 –1820).

### **The Educational Reform of Chinese Islamic Education**

1. The reform of the Islamic education system began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of its changes was a reduction in Islamic content and a strengthening of modern scientific ideas in Xingjiang.

Wang Kuan (1948-1916), the most important Hui reformer, set up a Muslim teacher training school in Beijing that taught general subjects as well as Islamic doctrine and used both Chinese and Arabic languages.

He founded an elementary school especially for Muslim children.

2. From 1933 to 1944, the Soviet-influenced government of Sheng Shicai actively promoted secular education and did its best to undermine Islamic influence in the school. In 1936 there were eleven Islamic secondary schools in various parts of China other than Xingjiang. Of these, three were for religious education, four were teacher training schools, and the remainder was general education,

3. In 1945, the Islamic Theological College was opened at the main mosque in Chongqing. In the same year, three Hui girl schools were established in Qinghai with approximately 500 students of ages between 8 and 15 enrolled. The curriculum included a substantial emphasis on Arabic with the aim being to read the Quran (Mackerras, 1999).

4. As of the mid-1990s, there were seven Quranic colleges for religious instruction compared with 12 state-run national universities or institutes in 1991 (p. 43). Only men were admitted to these colleges. Other than gender, the chief criteria for entry was dedication to Islam, knowledge of the Quran, and general ability. Students were selected by examinations, both written and oral. The competition for entry was very keen. Courses at these colleges lasted five years. Virtually all students eventually graduated, and drop out rate was extremely low. Most students worked as ahongs after graduation. Students paid no fee; all cost was borne by the local government. This type of school was attached to the mosques.

5. The new cultural renaissance among Chinese members in modern times dates from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was facilitated by the efforts at improving religious knowledge and developing education. Many Islamic educational societies were established, such as East Asia Islamic Education in Beijing in 1906 and Islamic Education Society in Shanghai in 1907. This movement continued until the emergence of People's Republic of China (Huaizhong, 1996).

### **III. Chinese Educational Reform and Its Impact on Muslim Minority**

The educational policy of People's Republic of China (PRC) has gone through three important stages: 1) the 17 years after the establishment of the PRC, 2) the 18 years after the "Great Cultural Revolution", and, 3) the 15

years beginning in 1985 "Decision on Reforms of Educational System".

Minority education was not a national educational goal until 1985.

The process of setting up a secular education system was not totally new to the religiously committed minorities in 1949. It has gone further under the PRC than it ever did under the republic. As a result, China has a widespread system of secular education among the minorities (Mackerras, 1997). In this system the content relating to religion is likely to be negative.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949 and after the Reform program in the late 1970s, education has been characterized by attempts to universalize elementary education, develop a uniform national curriculum heavily emphasizing examinations, and to rely on teaching style based on the authority of teachers. There is a great demand for memorization and recitation.

Universal education is the aim of educational reformers. All the teaching materials and messages are very nationalistic in content. Such a universalistic system of educational policy and practice runs into problems in areas inhabited by national minorities who are linguistically and culturally different from the majority Han. As a result, the illiterate rate of Hui females is 42.7 %(23.7% for Han) and 31.7% of males (12.3% for Han) (Gladney, 1999).

Therefore, despite significant state efforts to promote education in Muslim areas, very little change happened between 1982 and 1990. Not only is elementary and secondary education provided in several primarily Muslim



languages (especially Uyghur, Kazakh, Kirgiz and Tajik), but also the state provides the normal minority nationality incentives for preferred college entrance. In all Muslim areas, the state has sought to adapt to Muslim needs by providing food that does not contain pork in Hui schools in urban areas. These efforts have not raised Muslim minority education in China. Gladney (1999) speculated that it might be due to the content of education, which is set by the central education bureau rather than adapting to local languages and Muslim customs (76).

## **VI. Modification of Educational policy for Minority**

In order for each student to reach a certain “cultural level” (Wenhua chengdu), the PRC government has made modifications for minority students. Policies such as the following were developed:

1. arrange some instruction in local language
2. establish special classes and sometimes separate secondary school for members of minorities
3. develop a system of separate institutions of higher education, such as the nationalities institution (Minzu Xueyan), mainly to train members of minority groups as teachers and bureaucrats to serve in their native areas.
4. have special consideration in examinations for entrance to higher education with somewhat lower test scores for minorities.

## V. Conclusion

Chinese authorities remain highly successful in keeping religion out of the secular education system among minority groups. However, Mackerras (1999) concluded that the clergy of the Islamic minorities are experiencing great success in gaining recruits to their ranks and in finding educational and social ways of keeping religion alive in the minds of the next generation. Islam appears to be gaining in strengths in many parts of the world, not just in China. However, many young people are eager to partake in modernization to obtain higher social status and living standards. Mackerras predicated the impact on religion would be weaker in the years to come. In summary, the Muslim religious study will still be taught in families and mosques, but it will have a hard time attracting young members of the generation to practice it in real life. However, Gladney (1991) concluded that after so many centuries of assimilative policies, Hui's identity has reemerged as socially relevant in the context of a new state policy that favors minority identity.

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